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SUBJECT: GOF TAKE ON IRAN SANCTIONS

Classified By: ECON M/C Thomas J. White for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) Daniel Parfait, A/S-equivalent for the Americas Bureau at the MFA, assured a visiting California State Senate delegation on September 21 that France and the USG are in complete agreement on the way forward with Iran. He said President Chirac,s determination to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons is striking, and discounted press analysis of Chirac,s statements earlier in the week about Iran as constituting a new crisis in Franco-American relations. Instead, he characterized Chirac, meetings with President Bush as a reaffirmation of both leaders, commitment to the EU-3 and P5 1 process. He explained how France has offered a sequencing scheme for beginning negotiations that would avoid a sanctions spiral or military action, but hopefully would lead Iran to give up its nuclear weapons ambitions. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) Daniel Parfait, A/S-equivalent for the Americas Bureau at the MFA welcomed a delegation from the California State Senate on September 21. Most of the discussion was focused on increasing economic, cultural, and educational links between the United States and France.

¶4. (C) Parfait cited the Middle East as an area where the USG and France are working together in ways not always apparent or reported in the press, highlighting Lebanon and Iran. He noted that on September 19, Presidents Bush and Chirac had talked and had come to agreement on exactly the same vision for Iran, sharing the same objectives with little difference on the details. Responding to a follow-up question from the delegation, Parfait said he is struck every time Chirac speaks of Iran by his determination for Iran not to acquire nuclear weapons. Just looking at a map at the neighborhood is enough to understand why. He recounted that in many closed discussions that determination is repeated.

¶5. (C) Parfait admitted that 2003 had been a crisis in Franco-American relations, but the turning point had been achieved last year when Secretary Rice visited Paris and spoke at the IEP (Sciences Po), followed by President Bush,s visit to France. During that visit, Parfait said Chirac was able to convince President Bush of the seriousness of Chirac,s determination, and that the EU-3 process was working to stop the nuclear option in Iran. At that time, President Bush committed the United States to help. Together, the countries made clear that Iran had but one choice: sanctions or cooperation.

¶16. (C) Parfait continued his analysis by affirming that Iran is reluctant to suspend enrichment based on promises from the West because of its history, and is currently maneuvering extremely well. Nevertheless, France is convinced that the military option would be very complicated. If one strikes targets in Iran, the strikes may not be in the right place because there may be many clandestine facilities. France wants to ready sanctions, but avoid them unless absolutely necessary. If the world gets into a sanctions spiral, it is difficult to know what the consequences might be.

¶17. (SBU) Yves Oudin, USA office director, noted how at the beginning of the week, some journalists had interpreted Chirac's remarks on Iran as signaling a new crisis in Franco-American relations because he said he was skeptical about sanctions. However, that is not the case. France simply has offered a sequencing scheme to first, agree on an agenda; second, suspend enrichment; third, suspend the UN sanctions process; and finally, the US joins in the negotiations with Iran.

COMMENT

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¶18. (C) Parfait and Oudin went to great lengths to minimize any suggestion that France has any differences with the USG on the way forward with Iran. But it is clear from our conversations with GOF officials that the growing possibility of financial sanctions or other options is worrying France.

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